



Windows to Wildlife



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The Idaho Watchable Wildlife Committee is comprised of the following agencies and organizations:

U.S. Bureau of Land Management

U.S. Forest Service

Idaho Department of Parks & Recreation

Idaho Audubon Council

U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

Idaho Department of Commerce

Idaho Department of Transportation

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Idaho Department of Fish and Game

Photo above: Christine Saxton holds a Goshawk (left) and Sharp-shinned Hawk (right) at Boise Peak Trapping Station. Photo by Bruce Haak/IDFG.

Feeder Favorites: Raptors at Your Feeders

by Vicky Runnoe, Idaho Department of Fish and Game Salmon Region

It happens without warning. You glance out your window to scan the birds feeding in your yard only to find a yard full of tiny statues. And silence. The normal chatter of finches is gone as is the bright “dee dee dee” of the chickadees. Nothing moves; all are seemingly frozen in place. Then suddenly, as if on cue, activity resumes as though no interruption had occurred. Or perhaps you find the usual flock exploding in every direction as a dove-sized blur hurls itself across your yard. Again the eerie silence of a place abandoned so suddenly, that time seems to have stopped. Then, by ones and twos, the birds slip back into your yard to feed. Both behaviors are a sure sign that a raptor has surveyed the vicinity acting as a reminder that life at a feeder may not be as safe as it appears.

Of the 25 or so birds of prey in Idaho, only the three members of the genus *Accipiter* can lay claim to the adaptations needed to specialize as predators of small songbirds.

Found in forested habitats, the Goshawk, Cooper's Hawk and Sharp-shinned Hawk have short broad wings and long tails that enable them to quickly maneuver through thick timber or shrubby habitats in search of prey. The largest of the accipiters, the Goshawk, is considered uncommon and is found year-round in dense forested areas. Goshawks rarely migrate into lower elevations since their prey is not migratory. However, smaller, higher elevation communities may occasionally find a Goshawk present in the winter especially if pigeons are abundant.

Both the uncommon Cooper's Hawk and more frequently seen Sharp-shinned Hawk migrate into lower elevations in winter to search of food, and are most likely to be seen scouting feeding stations. The



Goshawk

Wayne Melquist/IDFG

FEEDER FAVORITES

Sharp-shinned Hawk winters throughout Idaho and is commonly seen in cities where it takes advantage of the numbers of birds using feeders. In fact, an Idaho banding study showed that individuals of this species sometimes occupy the same urban areas during consecutive winters.

While the thought of feeding the birds in winter is appealing to a great number of people, the thought of feeding birds that may, in turn, become food for another bird may seem quite a different matter. However, it is important to remember that these predatory birds are simply doing the job nature intended. Raptors feed opportunistically, capturing prey whenever and wherever possible. And a yard bustling with bird activity can provide a very important meal for a hungry bird of prey.

Data collected by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's Project FeederWatch, shows that most FeederWatch participants report only 1-2 depredation events per winter. In Idaho, Sharp-shinned Hawks were reported visiting only 38% of feeders last winter. Only 22% of feeders in the Northern Rocky Mountain region reported visits by this species during this same time.

The birds captured by both Cooper's Hawks and Sharp-shinned Hawks tend to be members of widespread species that spend a considerable amount of time foraging on the ground. Furthermore, seven species make up the majority of birds taken by accipiters: mourning dove, blue jay (in the eastern United States), European starling, dark-eyed junco, pine siskin, house finch and house sparrow. Of these seven, research indicates that Sharp-shinned Hawks prey most extensively on house sparrows.

Identifying which accipiter has captured a bird at your feeder can be a challenge. While the short broad wings, long tail, gray back and streaked breast make identification to the accipiter genus relatively easy, Sharp-shinned Hawks and Cooper's Hawks are similar enough to require careful observation before identification is possible. And sometimes, you may still be unsure of just who came dashing through your yard!

Of the two species, the Cooper's Hawk is the larger although a male Cooper's Hawk can be similar in size to a female Sharp-shinned Hawk. In general, however, Cooper's Hawks are a crow-sized raptor. When perched, their legs appear to be thick and substantial. The tail is rounded with a broad white terminal band. In adults, the back is uniformly gray with a pale nape. Darker feathers on the large head give the bird the appearance of wearing a skull cap. The breast is covered with rusty barring. In flight, Cooper's Hawks have stiff shallow wingbeats with the bird's head projecting well beyond its wings.

While approximately 80% of a Cooper's Hawk's diet is made up of birds, they will also capture small mammals and have even been known to catch fish. In Idaho, Cooper's Hawks breed



Goshawk

from the central part of the state northward through the panhandle. Idaho's population is partially migratory, moving to lower elevations and into the southern part of the state during the winter months.

The smaller dove-sized Sharp-shinned Hawk is the smallest of the accipiters. An extremely agile bird, Sharp-shinned Hawks have been known to grab birds from branches and in mid-air. Their hunting strategy often consists of short flights where the bird skims closely over and around bushes and trees to surprise potential prey. This behavior has earned them the nickname "blue darter."

Adult Sharp-shinned Hawks have very similar plumage to Cooper's Hawks, but with some important differences. They lack the broad white terminal band on the tail, which often appears squared. The dark feathers on the head continue onto the nape of the neck giving this bird a hooded appearance. Sharp-shinned Hawks have pencil-like legs that give the impression of delicacy. In flight, their

head barely projects beyond the wings, which beat quickly with a slight flick at the wrist.

Sharp-shinned Hawks have the largest range of all the accipiters. Here in Idaho their range is similar to that of the Cooper's Hawk with additional scattered populations in the eastern and southeastern parts of the state. They migrate extensively across Idaho in the fall. Since they prey almost exclusively on birds, Sharp-shinned Hawks are the accipiter that you are most likely to see at your feeding station.

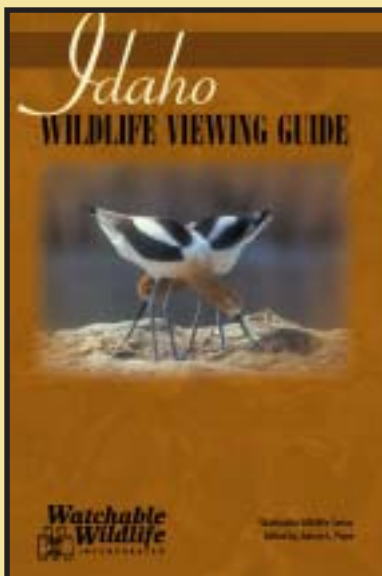
If you spot what you feel sure is an accipiter, but the view through your binoculars is of a brownish bird, don't despair. You are probably hosting an immature accipiter and they can pose even more of an identification challenge than their parents. In both Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks, plumage in young birds is brownish. The eyes are yellow instead of the deep red of an adult and the head feathers are brown, lacking the "capped" or "hooded" look of an adult bird. Both the size and "rounded versus square" tail can be used to help try and distinguish young accipiters. In addition, the brownish streaking on the breast continues onto the lower breast and belly of a Sharp-shinned Hawk, while the lower breast and belly of a young Cooper's Hawk tends to be white. Sharp-shinned youngsters also have a pale stripe over the eye, which is missing in the Cooper's Hawk.

If you have the chance to carefully observe one of these lovely raptors, but still feel unsure of what it is, do not feel bad. Many are the experienced birders who have had to be satisfied with just knowing it is an accipiter! Enjoy the encounter and the bit of the wild that the rush of one of these predators brings to your yard.

Rich Howard

Idaho WATCHABLE WILDLIFE

VIEWING GUIDE AND POSTER NOW AVAILABLE!



About the Guide

The *Idaho Wildlife Viewing Guide*, a *Watchable Wildlife* publication, contains 100 of Idaho's best wildlife viewing sites. Each site includes location descriptions and their wildlife, helpful viewing tips, best visiting times, photographs, locator maps, directions, and contact information.

\$11.95

*Copies of the Idaho Wildlife Viewing Guide
and Poster are available from:*

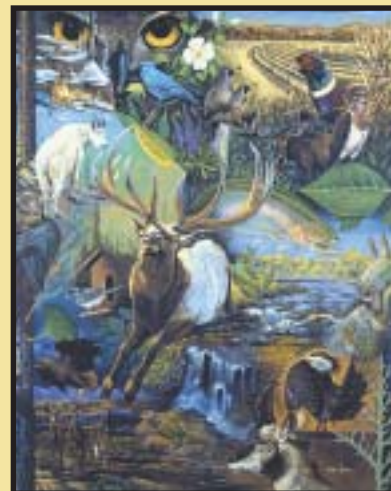
*Idaho Department of Fish and Game,
P.O. Box 25, 600 S. Walnut St., Boise, Idaho
83707 • 208-334-3700*

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About the Poster

Idaho artist Ward Hooper painted a masterpiece in honor of Idaho's "Watchable Wildlife." The original painting, almost 3' by 4', depicts various Idaho wildlife, fish, and plant species. If you look closely at this poster, the state of Idaho appears before your eyes! Back side of poster contains educational information about Idaho's eco-systems and some of the state's most popular species.

*Proceeds from sales of the Guide
through Idaho Department of Fish and Game
will benefit Watchable Wildlife viewing sites in Idaho.*



For more information about Idaho's Watchable Wildlife Program, contact:
Idaho Department of Fish and Game • Nongame Program • P.O. Box 25, 600 S. Walnut, Boise, Idaho 83707-0025 • (208) 334-3700 • <http://www.state.id.us/fishgame>
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IDAHO WILDLIFE VIEWING GUIDE

The Idaho Wildlife Viewing Guide is your ticket to the premier places to see Idaho's wildlife. Each of the 100 sites in the book include a Description of the areas habitat and scenic values and Viewing Information on which species to look for in certain locations. There are also species symbols, recreation symbols, and available facilities symbols for quick reference. This new edition includes ecosystem descriptions, easy to read maps and beautiful new photographs and artwork. This book is great to have stashed in your vehicle or a great addition to your library. Remember, always respect and enjoy Idaho's wildlife!

RIPARIAN ECOSYSTEM



Riparian (wetland) areas are scattered throughout Idaho, most commonly found in thin strips of lush, green vegetation near rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, and marshes. These "ribbons of green" are often comprised of willow, dogwood, and wild rose under cottonwood overstories. Marsh cattails, pond cattails, and sedges water in the breeze while red-winged blackbirds and yellow warblers balance upon them for a moment's rest. The bald eagle and great blue heron wait patiently for a tasty dinner of trout while the mighty moose, river otter, and beaver busily explore the riparian territory. Waterfowl abounds in wetlands including mallards, teal, and wood ducks. Frogs, salamanders, and garter snakes, amidst insects such as dragonflies and mayflies, complete one of Idaho's most complex ecosystems.



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7 GAMLIN LAKE PRESERVE

DESCRIPTION: Gamlin Lake, located at the northern end of Lake Pend Oreille, has a diversely vegetated shoreline, wetlands, and good waterfowl habitat. A fairly moist, coniferous forest surrounds the lake.

VIEWING INFORMATION: In addition to waterfowl, check for common yellowthroats and red-winged blackbirds. Amphibians include spotted and wood frogs. The forest sustains western red cedar, western hemlock, grand fir, western larch, and Douglas fir and supports at least 27 nesting bird species, including the pileated woodpecker and Swainson's thrush. Mammals include beaver, black bear, white-tailed deer, and elk. Enjoy wildlife and wildflower viewing, fishing, kayaking, canoeing, hiking, and a serene atmosphere.



SITE NOTES: Follow Glengary Bay Road along the lake for about one mile to the parking area, where trails can be accessed. The boat launch is located off Glengary Bay Road, about a half mile before the parking area.

CONTACT INFORMATION: The Nature Conservancy (208/676-8176), BLM (208/769-5000)

SIZE: 401 acres

CLOSEST TOWN: Sagle



Spotted frog

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THANK YOU

Thank You to All Contributors

Our sincere thanks go to all supporters of the Nongame Program, financially or otherwise. Without your contributions, the Nongame Program could not conduct critical research, hold wildlife viewing events, or publish this newsletter. The following people made direct donations, purchased or renewed a wildlife license plate, or let us know of their tax checkoff donation. These lists represent only newsletter subscribers who have returned a subscription form between September 1–November 30, 2003, and marked the contributor box. Many subscribers not listed here have contributed generously and Idaho's nongame wildlife thanks all of you.

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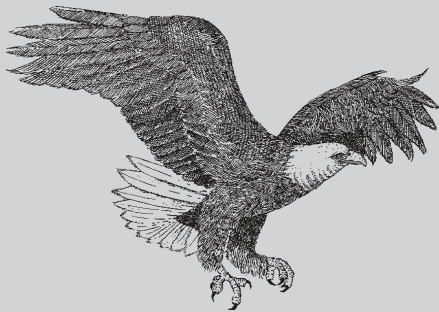
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Bald Eagle Day

Bald Eagle Day 2004 Jan 24
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invites you to view live raptors,
presentations, hands on
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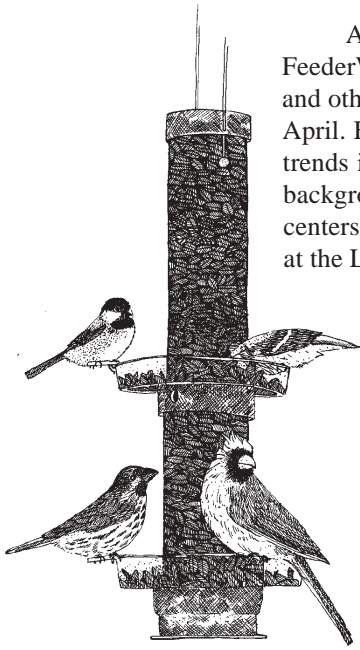
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Project FeederWatch and You



Anyone with an interest in birds can participate in Project FeederWatch, including you. Project FeederWatch is a winter-long survey of birds that visit feeders at backyards, nature centers, community areas, and other locales in North America. FeederWatchers count the highest numbers from November through early April. FeederWatch helps scientists track broadscale movements of winter bird populations and long-term trends in bird distribution and abundance. FeederWatch is conducted by people of all skill levels and backgrounds, including children, families, individuals, classrooms, retired persons, youth groups, nature centers, and bird clubs. All you need is some type of bird feeder, and you report your bird counts to scientists at the Lab of Ornithology, either over their web site or on paper Data Forms. There is a \$15 annual participation fee that covers your Research Kit and newsletter subscription, staff support, web design, and data analysis. Project FeederWatch is supported almost entirely by these participation fees. The Research Kit includes instructions, a bird identification poster, a wall calendar, a resource guide to bird feeding, and data forms—everything you need to start counting your birds. As a FeederWatcher, you will learn more about winter birds and how their populations are faring. You'll also contribute to the science and conservation of North American feeder birds.

Project Feeder-Watch is operated by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in partnership with the National Audubon Society, Bird Studies Canada, and Canadian Nature Federation. For more information, check out their website <http://birds.cornell.edu/> or contact:

Project FeederWatch
Cornell Lab of Ornithology
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